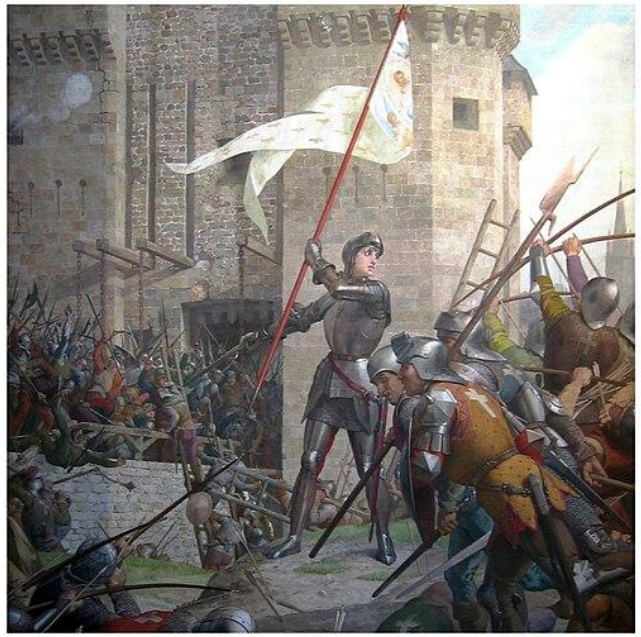
Battle of Verneuil

The Battle of Verneuil was a battle of the Hundred Years' War, fought on 17 August 1424 near Verneuil-sur-Avre in Normandy between an English army and a combined Franco-Scottish force, augmented by Milanese heavy cavalry. The battle was a significant English victory, and was described by them as a second Agincourt.

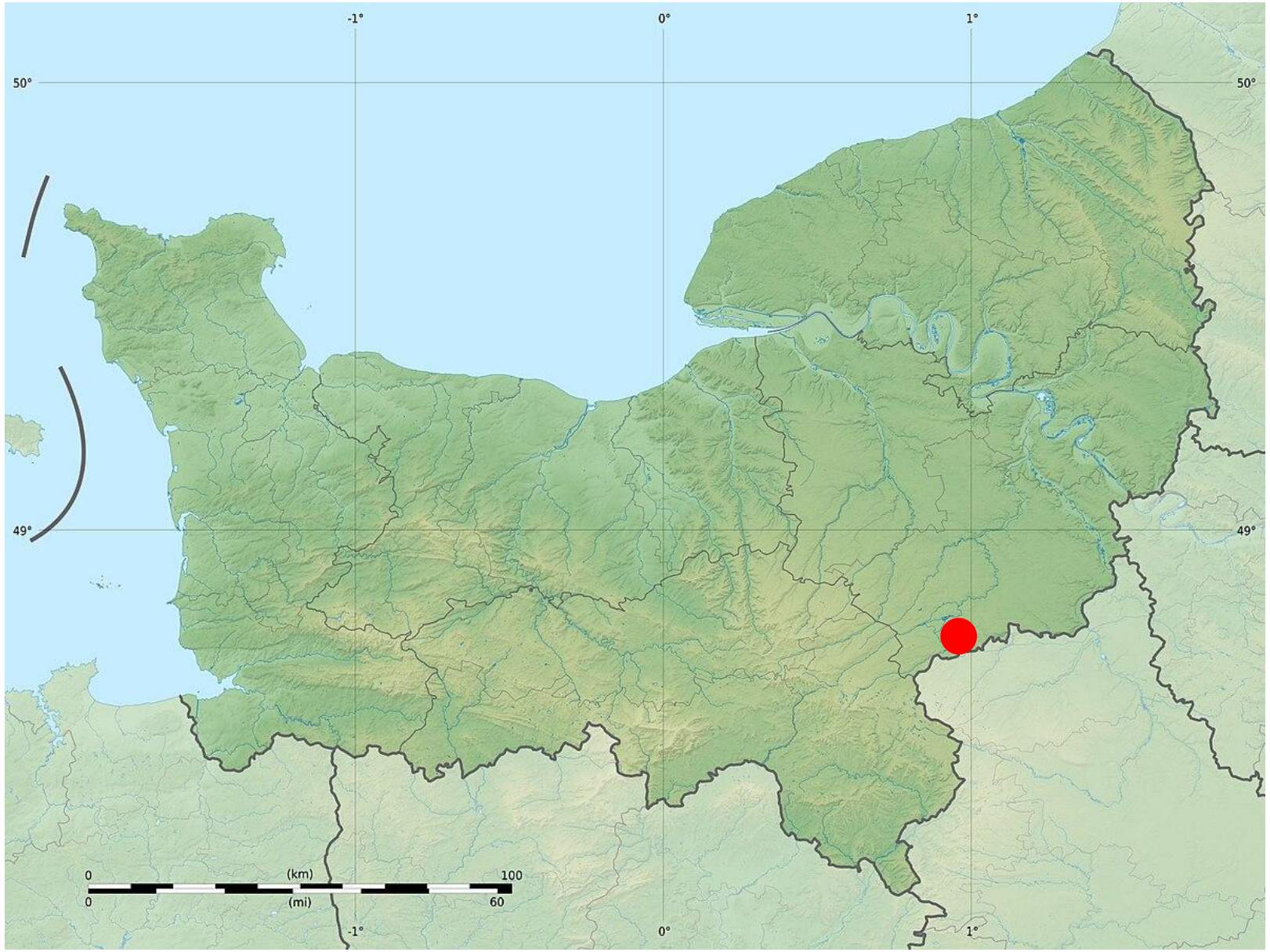
The battle started with a short archery exchange between English longbowmen and Scottish archers, after which the force of 2,000 Milanese heavy cavalry charged the English, brushed aside an ineffective English arrow barrage and wooden archer's stakes, penetrated the formation of English men-at-arms and routed one wing of their longbowmen.

The Milanese pursued the fleeing English off the field and went on to capture and loot the English baggage train. Meanwhile, the well-armoured English and Franco-Scottish men-at-arms clashed on foot in a ferocious hand-to-hand melee that went on for about 45 minutes. Many of the English longbowmen rallied and joined the struggle.

The French men-at-arms eventually routed, leaving the Scots alone in a last stand where they received no quarter from the English. The Milanese cavalry returned to the field at the end of the battle but fled upon discovering the fate of the Franco-Scottish force. Altogether some 6,000 French and Scottish were killed and 200 taken prisoner.

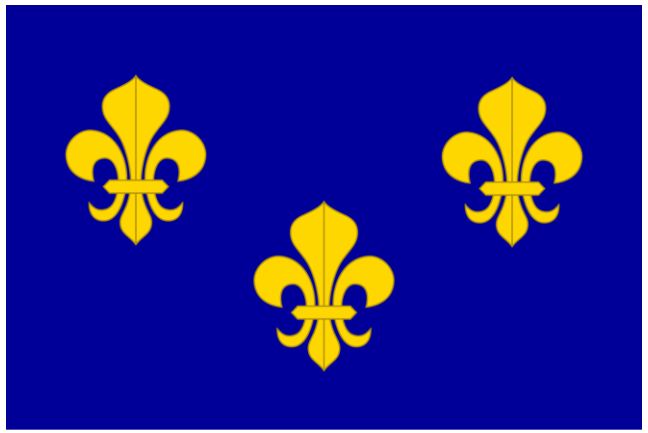


The Hundred Years' War (French: Guerre de Cent Ans; 1337–1453) was a conflict between the kingdoms of England and France and a civil war in France during the Late Middle Ages. It emerged from feudal disputes over the Duchy of Aquitaine and was triggered by a claim to the French throne made by Edward III of England. The war grew into a broader military, economic, and political struggle involving factions from across Western Europe, fuelled by emerging nationalism on both sides. The periodisation of the war typically charts it as taking place over 116 years. However, it was an intermittent conflict which was frequently interrupted by external factors, such as the Black Death, and several years of truces.



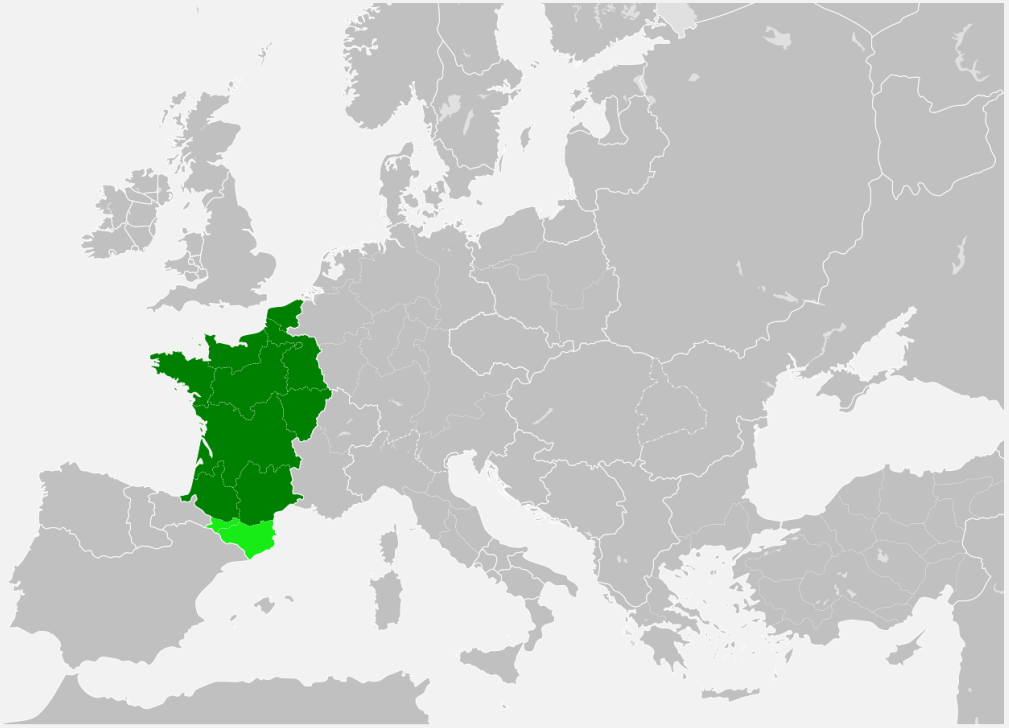
Commanders and leaders
Count of Aumale †
Earl of Douglas †
Earl of Buchan †
Viscount of Narbonne †
Duke of Bedford
Earl of Salisbury

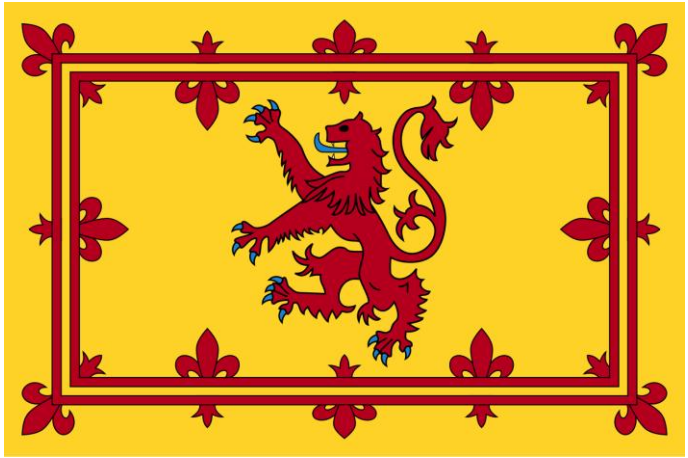
Belligerents
Kingdom of France
Kingdom of Scotland
Supported by:
Duchy of Milan
Kingdom of England



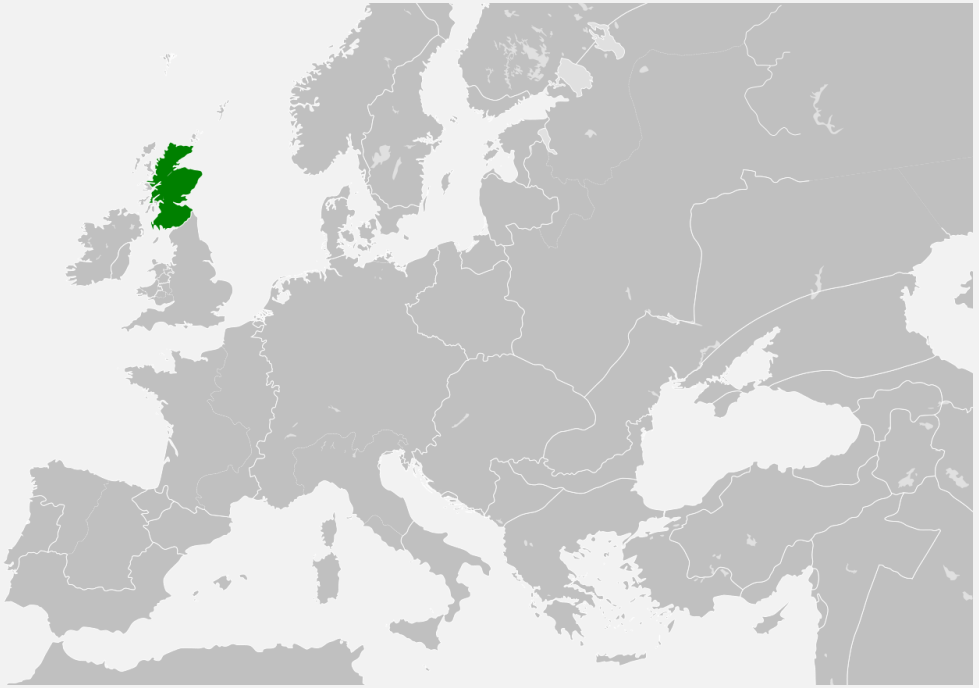
843 – 1792 – 1814 –1815 – 1815–1848

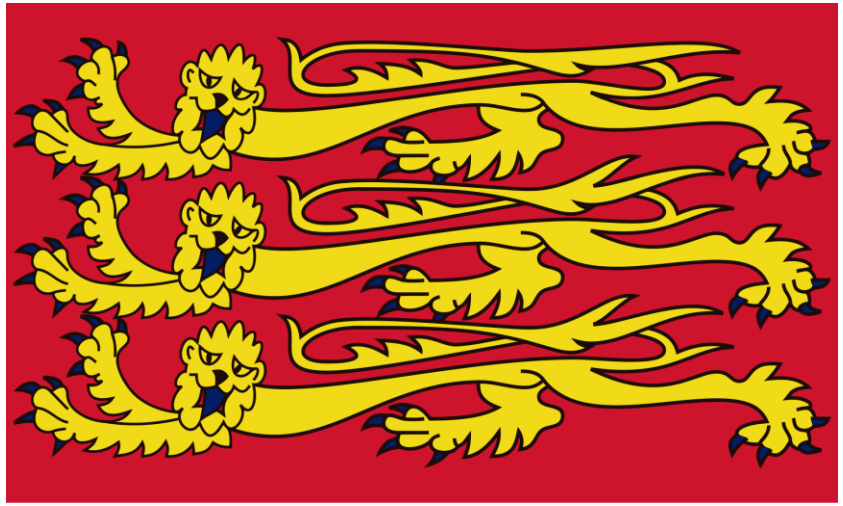
The Kingdom of France was descended directly from the western Frankish realm of the Carolingian Empire, which was ceded to Charles the Bald with the Treaty of Verdun (843). A branch of the Carolingian dynasty continued to rule until 987, when Hugh Capet was elected king and founded the Capetian dynasty. The territory remained known as Francia and its ruler as rex Francorum ('king of the Franks') well into the High Middle Ages. The first king calling himself rex Francie ('King of France') was Philip II, in 1190, and officially from 1204. From then, France was continuously ruled by the Capetians and their cadet lines under the Valois and Bourbon until the monarchy was abolished in 1792 during the French Revolution.

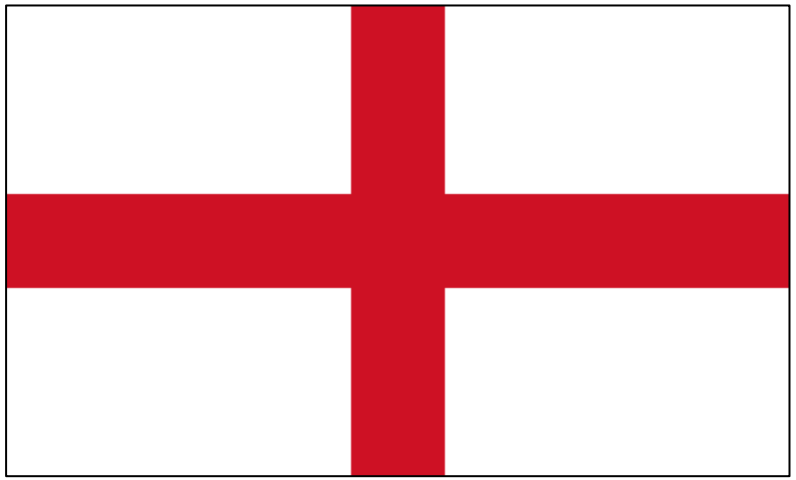




The Kingdom of Scotland was a sovereign state in northwest Europe, traditionally said to have been founded in 843. Its territories expanded and shrank, but it came to occupy the northern third of the island of Great Britain, sharing a land border to the south with the Kingdom of England. During the Middle Ages, Scotland engaged in intermittent conflict with England, most prominently the Wars of Scottish Independence, which saw the Scots assert their independence from the English. Following the annexation of the Hebrides and the Northern Isles from Norway in 1266 and 1472 respectively, and the capture of Berwick by England in 1482, the territory of the Kingdom of Scotland corresponded to that of modern-day Scotland, bounded by the North Sea to the east, the Atlantic Ocean to the north and west, and the North Channel and Irish Sea to the southwest.







The Kingdom of England was a sovereign state on the island of Great Britain from the 10th century, when it was unified from various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, until 1 May 1707, when it united with Scotland to form the Kingdom of Great Britain, which would later become the United Kingdom. The Kingdom of England was among the most powerful states in Europe during the medieval and early modern periods. Beginning in the year 886 Alfred the Great reoccupied London from the Danish Vikings and after this event he declared himself King of the Anglo-Saxons, until his death in 899. During the course of the early tenth century, the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were united by Alfred's descendants Edward the Elder (reigned 899–924) and Æthelstan (reigned 924–939) to form the Kingdom of the English. In 927.

In 1424, France was still recovering from the 1415 disaster at Agincourt, and the northern provinces were in the hands of the English following Henry V's conquest of Normandy. The Dauphin (heir to the French throne) Charles had been disinherited due to the 1420 Treaty of Troyes and, upon the death of his father Charles VI in October 1422, his status as King of France was recognised only in the regions still not occupied by the English, namely the south of the country (less the province of Guyenne in the southwest). The civil war between the pro-Dauphin Armagnacs and the pro-English Burgundians showed no sign of ending.[citation needed]

The death of Henry V in August 1422, two months before that of Charles VI, brought no relief to the French, as the continuing English war effort was managed by Henry's brother Bedford, acting as regent for the nine-month-old Henry VI. The Dauphin desperately needed soldiers, and looked to Scotland, France's old ally, to provide essential military aid.

The first large contingent of Scots troops came to France in the autumn of 1419, some 6,000 men under the command of John Stewart, Earl of Buchan. These men, strengthened from time to time by fresh volunteers, soon became an integral part of the French war effort, and by the summer of 1420 the "Army of Scotland" was a distinct force in the French royal service. They proved their worth the following year, playing a large part in the victory at the Battle of Baugé, the first serious setback experienced by the English. The mood of optimism this engendered collapsed in 1423, when many of Buchan's men fell at the Battle of Cravant.
At the beginning of 1424, Buchan brought with him a further 6,500 men. He was accompanied by Archibald, Earl of Douglas, one of the most powerful noblemen of Scotland. On 24 April, the army, comprising 2,500 men-at-arms and 4,000 archers, entered Bourges, the Dauphin's headquarters, helping to raise Charles' spirits. A body of 2,000 heavy cavalry was hired from Filippo Maria Visconti, the Duke of Milan, after a treaty of alliance on 17 February.

These men-at-arms were led by the Frenchman le Borgne-Caqueran and clad in complete suits of tempered steel plate armour, and rode barded horses. A smaller Milanese cavalry force had been decisive against the Burgundians at La Buissière in September 1423.
The victory at La Buissière and an English defeat by the French under the Count of Aumale at the Battle of La Brossinière on 26 September 1423 improved the Dauphin's strategic situation.
The outflanking and destruction of a body of English longbowmen at La Brossinière convinced the French that it would be possible to destroy a large English army in a decisive battle. A plan was devised – the main English army would be sought out and crushed, after which Charles VII would be crowned as king in Reims.

The French army was under the command of the Count of Aumale, a French commander who had defeated the English at La Brossiniere and the Burgundians at Le Buissiere. He was accompanied by the Viscount of Narbonne, and their army joined with the Scots under the Earl of Buchan. Thus reinforced, the Franco-Scottish army was confident it could fight the English and yet again secure a great victory as at Baugé.

In the summer of 1424 the English army, under the command of Bedford and the experienced Earl of Salisbury, laid siege to the French stronghold of Ivry, 42 km (26 miles) northeast of Verneuil.

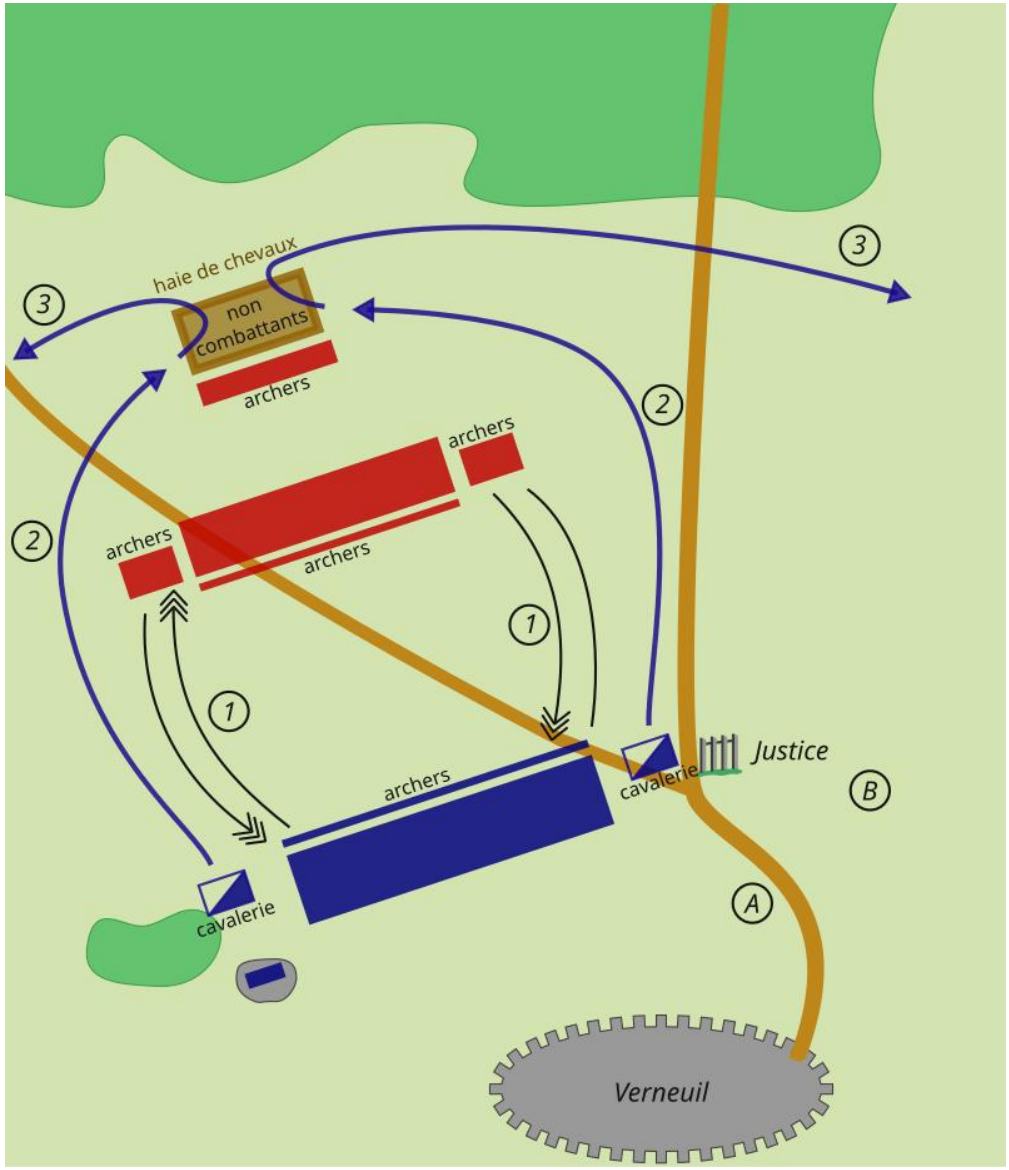
The Franco-Scottish army made ready to march to Ivry and lift the siege of the castle, and Buchan left Tours on 4 August to meet with Aumale and Narbonne. But before the army could reach the castle, it surrendered to the English. Uncertain what to do, the allied commanders held a council of war.[18] The Scots and some of the younger French noblemen were eager for battle, but Narbonne and the senior nobility had not forgotten Agincourt and were reluctant to take the risk.

As a compromise it was agreed to attack the English strongholds on the Norman border, beginning with Verneuil in the west. The town was taken by a simple ruse: A group of Scots, leading some of their fellow countrymen as prisoners, pretended to be English, and claimed that Bedford had defeated the allies in battle, whereupon the gates were opened.
On 15 August, Bedford received news that Verneuil was in French hands and he and his army marched there as quickly as they could. As he neared the town two days later, the Scots persuaded their French comrades to give battle. Douglas is said to have received a message from Bedford that he had come to drink with him and prayed for an early meeting. He replied that having failed to find the duke in England he had come to seek him in France.
On 16 August, Bedford dismissed the Burgundian commander L'Isle Adam and his 1000-2000 man contingent sending them back to the siege at Nesle in Picardy. Bedford depriving his army of so many men just prior to battle has been a confusing decision for historians to explain, though some cite a growing lack of trust between the English and Burgundians.

The Franco-Scottish army deployed a mile north of Verneuil on an open plain astride the road leading out of the forest of Piseux. The flat fields had been chosen to give the greatest advantage to the Milanese cavalry, where they could be employed to their full potential against the enemy archers. The mounted Milanese men-at-arms under Caqueran drew up in front of the dismounted Franco-Scottish men-at-arms, who were formed into one battle. Narbonne's Spanish mercenary men-at-arms and most of the French were situated on the left of the road, while Douglas and Buchan were on the right. Aumale was given overall command, but this heterogeneous army defied all attempts at coordinated direction. On emerging from the forest, Bedford likewise put his men in a single battle, to match the disposition of the enemy, with the usual distribution of men-at-arms in the centre and archers on the wings and in front, with sharpened stakes ahead of them.

Bedford placed a lightly-armoured rearguard of 500–2,000 men, some mounted, to protect the baggage train and the horses. Some 8,500 horses were tethered together to link the main army to the baggage wagons as a precaution against encirclement.

Both sides wanted the other to take the initiative in beginning the battle, and so, from dawn to about 4:00 pm, the two armies stood facing each other under the blazing sun. Bedford is also said to have sent a herald to Douglas once both armies had been deployed to ask what terms for battle he required, to which Douglas grimly replied that the Scots would neither give nor receive any quarter.

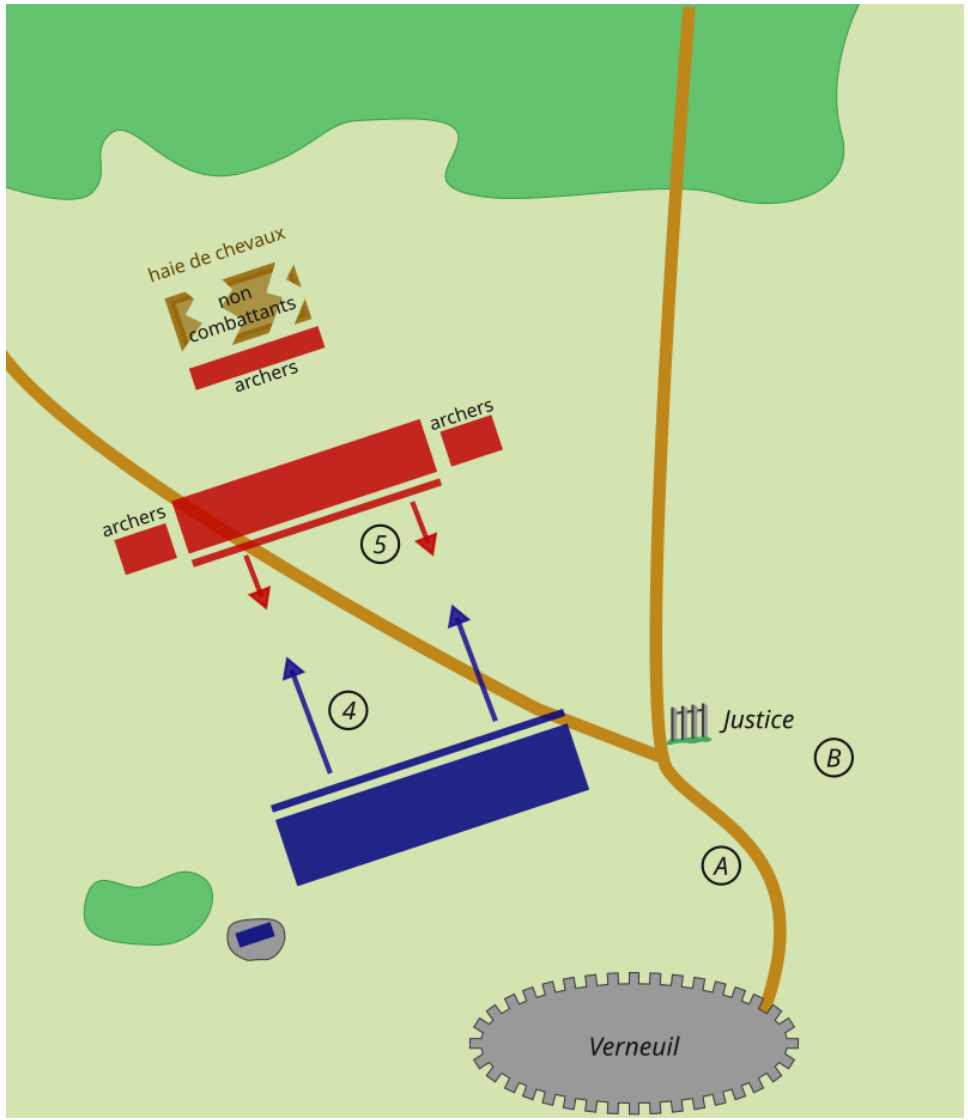


Legend : A : This path, which is actually more winding, is called "chemin de la bataille" on the 1837 land register. B : This area is called "le Fossé Rouge" on the same land register, the site of a massacre or mass grave. 1 : Exchange of arrows between archers. 2 : Charge of French and Lombard cavalry. 3 : Cavalry flee, after looting the English camp.

At about 4 pm, Bedford ordered his men to advance. The English soldiers shouted "St. George! Bedford!" as they slowly began to cross the field. A short archery duel between English and Scottish archers took place, with inconclusive results. At the same time, as if by some pre-arranged signal, the 2,000 Milanese mounted men-at-arms charged the English front line. They brushed aside the English wooden stakes that could not be secured in ground baked hard by the summer sun. English arrows proved ineffective against the Italian mercenaries' superior armor. The shock effect of the Milanese charge terrified the English, with men-at-arms and archers knocked over, and gaps torn in the English ranks as they tried to avoid the onrushing horsemen and others throwing themselves to the ground and being ridden over by the cavalry. The Milanese rode through the entire English formation, dispersing the longbowmen on the English right.

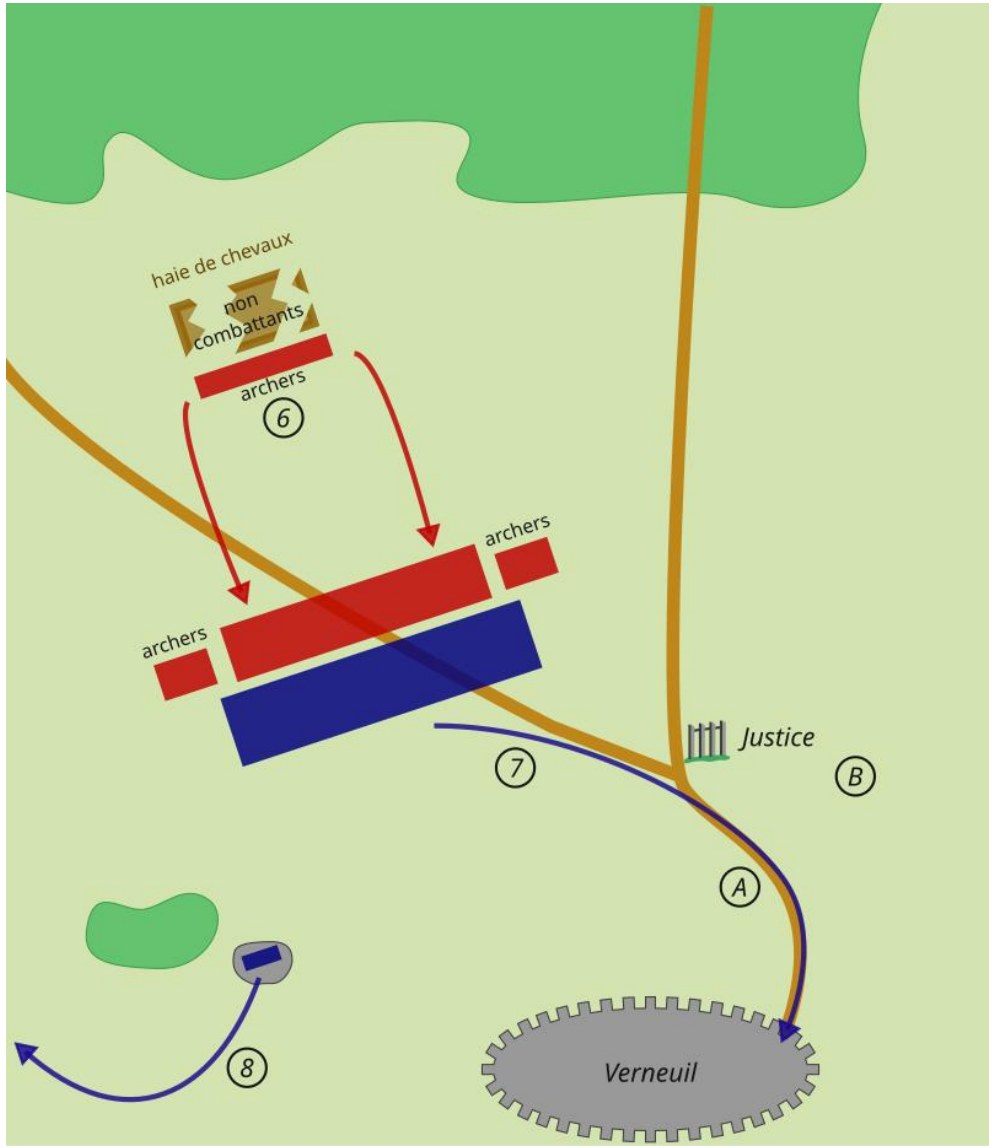
Many of the English panicked in the face of the Milanese charge, and a Captain Young was afterwards found guilty of cowardice for retreating with the 500 men under his command without orders, considering the battle as lost. Young was hanged, drawn and quartered as punishment for his retreat. English mounted troops fled to Conches, where they proclaimed the battle lost to the town's small garrison. At Bernay, more Englishmen announced Bedford's defeat. At Pont-Audemer, news of an English disaster provoked an uprising, with retreating English troops divested of their armour and horses. A series of smaller uprisings in the countryside also took place.

The Milanese pursued the fleeing English and attacked the English baggage train, triggering an instant rout. Some of the English rearguard ran away, fleeing on horseback or foot with the Milanese continuing to either give chase or loot the baggage train.



After this devastating cavalry charge, Bedford rallied his soldiers, the English men-at-arms showing great discipline and reforming their ranks. Sensing a victory, the French men-at-arms led a confused charge, with Narbonne's men reaching the English before the rest of their comrades. The French disorder was in part a result of the desire to close in fast to avoid English arrows. As the French advanced under Aumale, they shouted "Montjoie! Saint Denis!". Bedford's men-at-arms advanced in good order towards their French opponents, pausing often and giving a shout each time. The men-at-arms under Salisbury were hard-pressed by the Scots. A small force of French heavy cavalry on the right attempted to outflank the English line but were repelled by arrows from the redeployed English left wing of 2,000 longbowmen, who used the lines of tethered horses for cover. The head-on clash between the superbly armoured English and Franco-Scottish men-at-arms on the field of Verneuil, both of whom had marched on foot into battle, resulted, in the words of the British medievalist Desmond Seward, in "a hand-to-hand combat whose ferocity astounded even contemporaries".

Wavrin recalled how "the blood of the dead spread on the field and that of the wounded ran in great streams all over the earth". For about three-quarters of an hour, Frenchmen, Scotsmen and Englishmen stabbed, hacked and cut each other down on the field of Verneuil without either side gaining any advantage in what is often considered to be one of the most fiercely fought battles of the entire war. Bedford himself fought in the battle, wielding a fearsome two-handed poleaxe, leading one veteran to recall: "He reached no one whom he did not fell". Seward noted that Bedford's poleaxe "smashed open an expensive armour like a modern tin can, the body underneath being crushed and mangled before even the blade sank in"



Many of the English longbowmen on the right, initially scattered by the Milanese charge, had by now reformed and they, along with the longbowmen on the left who had repelled the French cavalry, joined the battle. The longbowmen joined the main struggle with a great shout that boosted the morale of the English men-at-arms, who began a devastating attack on the French. After some time, the French battle line gave ground before breaking and was chased back to Verneuil, where many, including Aumale, fell into the moat and were drowned. The ditches outside of town were the scene of a merciless killing of the routed French men-at-arms. Narbonne and many other French nobles were killed.
Having defeated the French, Bedford called a halt to the pursuit and returned to the battlefield, where Salisbury was hotly engaged with the Scots, now standing alone. The battle reached its closing stages when Bedford wheeled from the south to take the Scots on the right flank. Now almost surrounded, the Scots made a ferocious last stand but were overwhelmed. The English shouted "A Clarence! A Clarence!" invoking Thomas, Duke of Clarence, Bedford's brother, killed at Baugé.

The English killed any Scotsmen standing in their way; some surrendered but were slain, to avenge the death of Clarence. The long-standing enmity between Scotland and England meant no quarter was given, with almost the entire Scots force falling on the battlefield, including Douglas and Buchan. The Milanese cavalry returned to the battle at this point to discover their comrades slaughtered, and were put to flight in their turn after losing 60 men killed. They were pursued by the English until Bedford ordered a halt allowing the Milanese to flee the field.

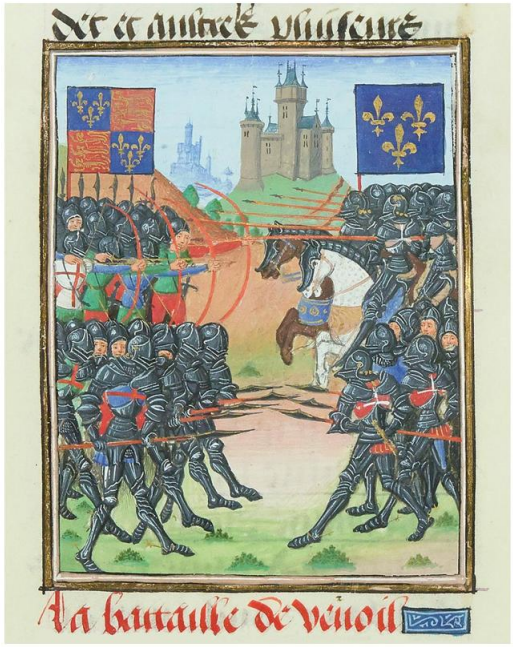
Thomas of Lancaster, Duke of Clarence (c. autumn 1387 – 22 March 1421) was a medieval English prince and soldier, the second son of Henry IV of England, brother of Henry V, and heir to the throne in the event of his brother's death. He acted as counselor and aide to both.

His father appointed him Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1401. Thomas, who was only fourteen, landed in Dublin in November 1401, and spent much of the next eight years in Ireland. He was nearly killed in a skirmish near Dublin in 1406.

John Stewart, Earl of Buchan (c. 1381 – 17 August 1424) was a Scottish nobleman and soldier who fought alongside the Kingdom of France during the Hundred Years War. In 1419, he was sent to France by his father the Duke of Albany, Regent of Scotland, with a Scottish army of 6,000 men. Stewart led the combined Franco-Scottish army at the Battle of Baugé on 21 March 1421, where he comprehensively routed an English force under Thomas of Lancaster, Duke of Clarence.

However, two years later, Stewart was defeated and captured by an English force led by Thomas Montacute, 4th Earl of Salisbury at the Battle of Cravant in 1423. After the battle he was exchanged, and after his release in 1424 he was appointed Constable of France making him the effective Commander-in-Chief of the French army. On 17 August of that year, Buchan was killed in action fighting against English troops at the disastrous Battle of Verneuil, along with most of the Scottish troops in France. The battle led to the effective dissolution of the Scottish army in France. Verneuil was one of the bloodiest battles of the Hundred Years War, described by the English as a second Agincourt. Altogether some 6000 allied troops were killed, including 4000 Scots. The English lost 1600 men, an unusually high figure for them, far greater than their losses at Agincourt, indicating the ferocity of the fight. The Earl of Douglas fought on the losing side for the last time, joined in death by Buchan.

The Army of Scotland was severely mauled but it was not yet ready to march out of history. It received far fewer reinforcements from Scotland for campaigns against the English in France. This was not entirely unwelcome to the French as one French chronicler, Thomas Basin, wrote that the catastrophe at Verneuil was at least counterbalanced by seeing the end of the Scots "whose insolence was intolerable". Among the prisoners were the Duke of Alençon, Pierre, the bastard of Alençon and Marshal Gilbert Motier de La Fayette. Greatly saddened by the catastrophe at Verneuil, Charles VII continued to honour the survivors, one of whom, John Carmichael of Douglasdale (Jean VI de Saint-Michel), the chaplain of the dead Douglas, was created Bishop of Orléans (1426–1438).[citation needed] Bedford returned in triumph to Paris, where "he was received as if he had been God ... in short, more honour was never done at a Roman triumph than was done that day to him and his wife".



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